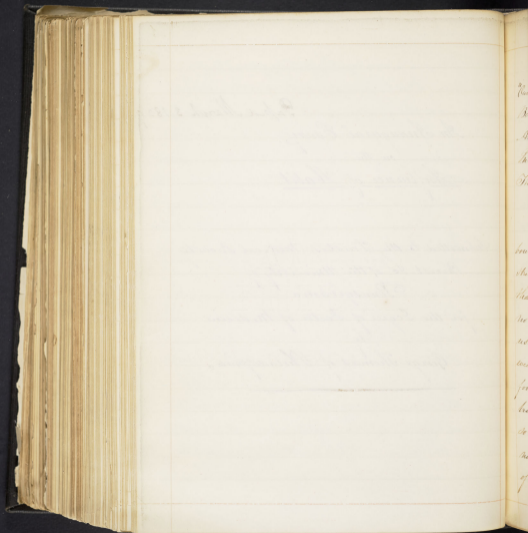


Paper March 8 1829  
An Inaugural Essay  
on the  
Influence of Habit

Submitted to the Trustees, Medical Faculty  
Barst. Sc. of the University of  
Pennsylvania  
for the Degree of Doctor of Medicine  
by  
George Thomas of Philadelphia.



Our torments also may, in length of time  
 Become our aliments; those piercing fires  
 Be soft as new snows, our temper changed  
 Into their temper; which must needs remove  
 The sensible of "Pain." — Paradise Lost —

In the contemplation of the works of a  
 beautiful Creator one of the first objects that  
 strikes our sense or merits consideration is  
 that "Paragon of Animals" that first and  
 noblest of sublunary beings, Man, for whose  
 use all things earthly were formed. Yet how  
 weak! how liable to err! how numerous his  
 foibles! and to what ends may he not be  
 brought by giving loose to these frailties  
 so inherent in his nature, from the most  
 noble, most "like a God" to the most inferior  
 of created beings.



Unlike the east and solid globe, the momentary, abode, which regularly performs her endless revolutions, he is liable by a thousand adverse gales to be wafted from his course and after being for a time tossed from billow to billow on life's storms and tempestuous sea is finally either engulfed in the quicksands of despair, or borne by halcyon gales into an endless and happy calm.

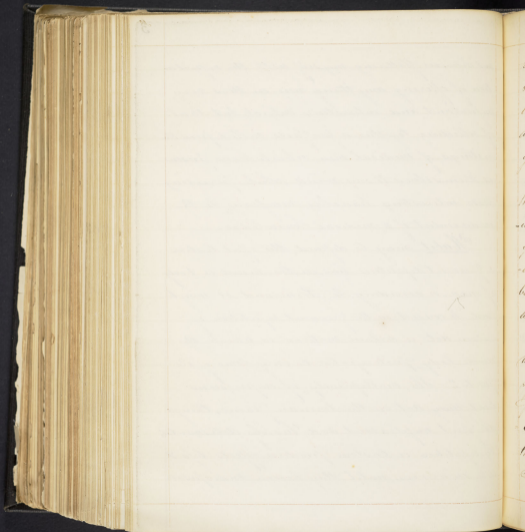
In our journey through life we are prone to fall into numberless habits and liable to be carried away by the whirlwinds of Passion, which, having once obtained an influence over us, cause us to rush headlong to our destruction. This not only holds in a moral, but also in a physical point of view.

To give a general outline of the influence of Habit in the production and cure of disease will be my endeavour in the following pages



not however flatter myself with the expectation of offering any thing new on this very important and interesting subject, but that of collecting together a few facts culled from the writings of medical men, which have presented themselves to my mind while pursuing those interesting branches necessary to the acquirement of a medical knowledge.

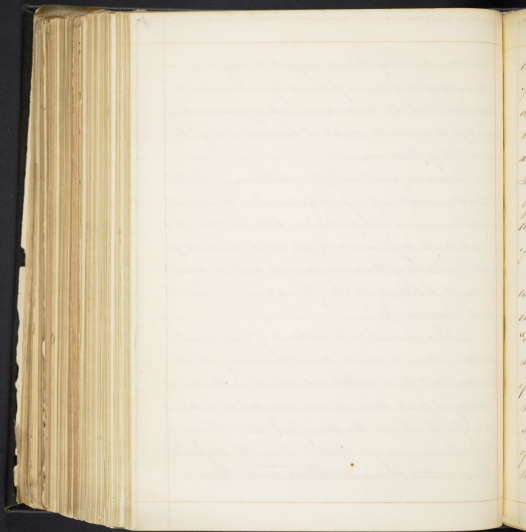
Habit may be defined the effect custom or frequent repetition has on the mind or body of man according to Richardson it may be said "to consist in the frequent repetition of certain acts or certain motions in which the whole body participates or only some of its parts." The multiplicity of impressions that may act on the human frame, though at first unpleasant and highly detrimental by repetition or custom produce effects less & less injurious, until they become indispensable



to health. The use of Seltzer at first is both nauseous & disgusting, and soon is followed by sickness and vomiting, but by continuance its effects are less and less disagreeable, until it becomes one of the greatest of luxuries.

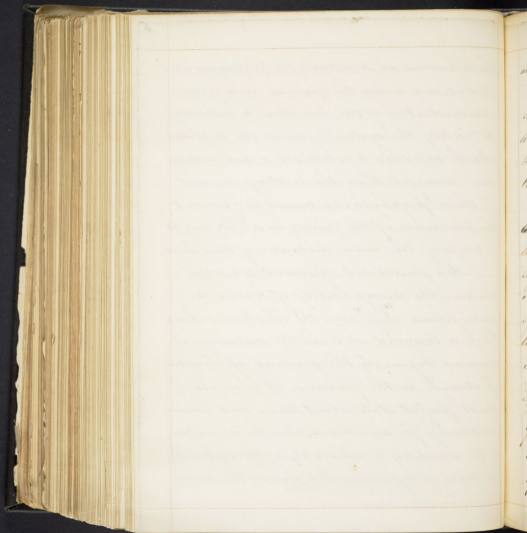
We are emphatically the children of Habit. When the evening of life approaches our sensations, our hours of leisure, our thoughts, are in a great degree influenced by it, and to dissipate the laws of this, our second nature, would be most likely, with the privation of wealth and happiness.

As a general rule actions of a dissimilar nature cannot exist simultaneously in the system, but that excitement, which is the most general will rule in the complete extinction of all others. On this fact the Theory of the phenomena of Habits seem to depend. Thus in the common Fever and Ague.



the indications are to mitigate the Paroxysm while present, and during the Apyrexia by a proper administration of our Remedies to endeavour to fortify the system against the expected attack, and thus to establish a new action more powerful than the existing one, and by these prophylactic means to prevent the recurrence of the Paroxysms. We might of course cite many instances of this kind.

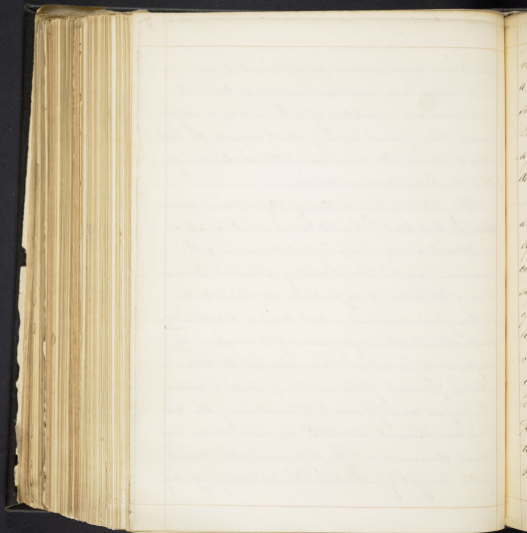
As a general rule, frequent repetition weakens the susceptibility of organs to impressions. "Life," says the illustrious Rush "is in a languid state in the morning; it acquires vigour by the gradual application of stimuli in the forenoon. It is in its most perfect state about noon and remains stationary for some hours. From the diminution of the sensibility & contractility of the system to the action of impressions it relaxes, in the evening



and becomes again languid at bottom?"

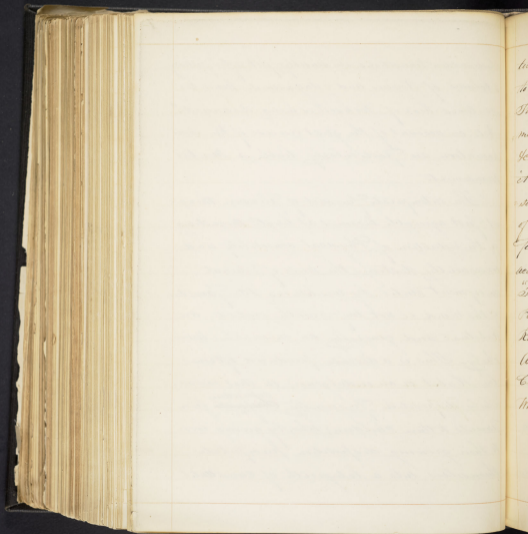
A person may accustom himself in time to take immense quantities of articles which at first would have proved highly deleterious to the most minute detail. We have numerous instances of this kind in Medical works.

The fact that repetition of impure foods renders them as legitimate should not be lost sight of in Practice. A change of Medicines is often required. In the Treatment of Chronic Diseases, it is of the utmost importance to prevent the system from becoming habituated & ultimately insensible to the impurities of Remedies by suspending for a time their administration. Habit prevents fatigue both of body & mind. The rapid and frequent transitions of the mind from one thing to another says Dr. Rush "will cause derangement by depriving the brain of the benefit of Habit. The debilitating effects of



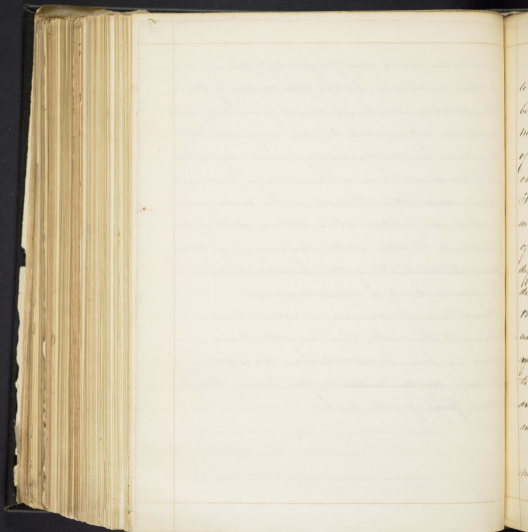
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these sudden transitions are sensibly felt after forming  
a volume of Poems and Magazines. Hence we  
sometimes hear of Book sellers being deranged. V  
Poets on account of the great exercise of the im-  
agination are particularly liable to Mental  
derangement.

The intemperate pursuit of pleasure though  
at first agreeable becomes at length disgusting  
by the reduction of Physical sensibility and  
consequently destroys the state of rational  
enjoyment until by weakening the faculties  
of the mind it, not un frequently ends in an  
Intellectual and generally an Incurable Melan-  
choly. This is a disease produced oftentimes  
by Habit or an indulgence in that Melan-  
choly disposition. <sup>depending</sup> ~~transmitted~~ from  
Parents to their children; who, by giving loose  
to their growing disposition, precipitate  
themselves into a labyrinth of error and Habit.



kind of the world thus frequently put an end  
 to their existence by the commission of suicide.  
 This disease sometimes arises from disappoint-  
 ments in a favourite object, grief, anxiety  
 &c.; these we can frequently believe; but when  
 it proceeds from a hereditary predispo-  
 sition and strengthened by the indulgence  
 of that disposition it is seldom within our  
 power to be able in the language of that  
 accurate delineator of the human heart,

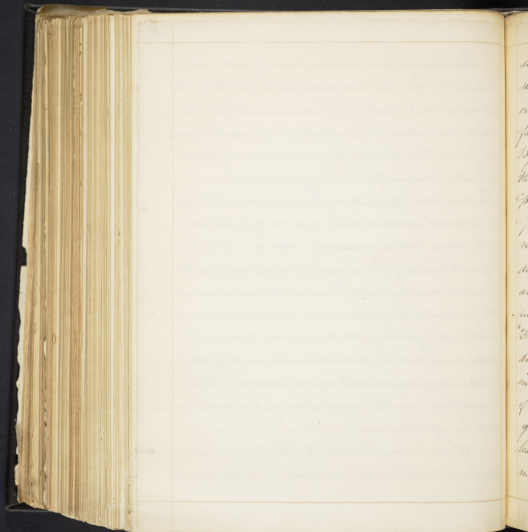
To administer to a mind diseased  
 Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
 Raze out the bitter troubles of the brain  
 And by some sweet oblivious distillation  
 Obliviate out the ~~troubles~~ the foul bottom of that <sup>stuff</sup> ~~poison~~  
 Which <sup>poisons</sup> ~~poisons~~ upon the heart.



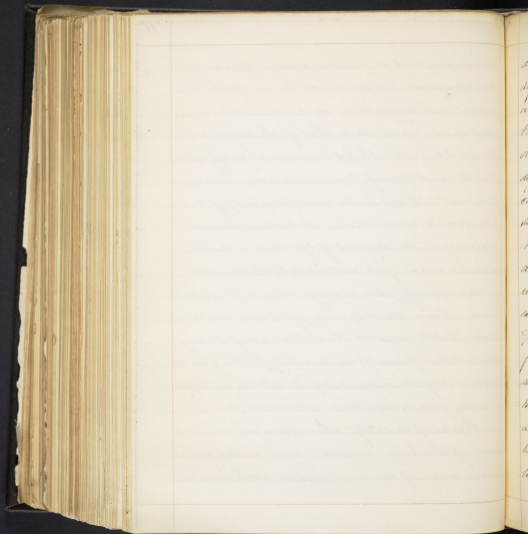
Physicians have hitherto paid little attention to this very important subject. When called to the bed of sickness particular inquiries should be made concerning the Patient's habits and Manners of life as they have a very important influence on the *Modus Operandi* of Medicines.

The susceptibility to impressions is much varied in different systems and even in different States of the same system or rather, idiosyncrasies or different Habits of the body, predispose to certain diseases and different Forms of the same disease though acted on by the same cause, and consequently the effects of Medicinal articles will be much modified by such variations. By attention to this very important object many valuable indications in the application of our remedies will be afforded us.

Of the many Habits to which man is most liable to become a slave or of the many

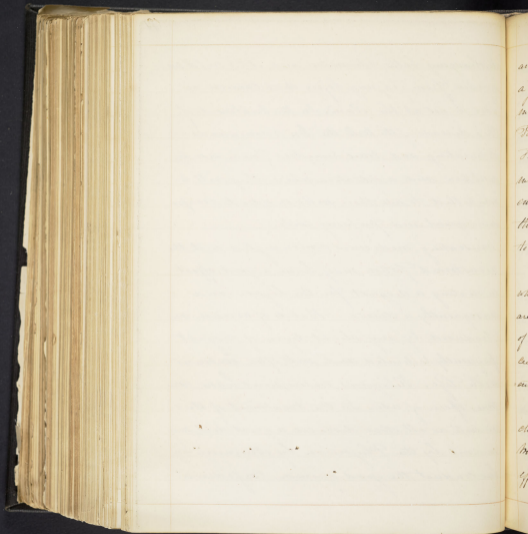


diseases incident to human nature, there is none more pernicious or deplorable in its effects, more critical and difficult in its treatment, or more fatal in its results, than that of Intemperance. By repetition the Habit becomes so firmly rooted that the most powerful means whether mental or physical will, not in the great majority of cases produce a reformation. It becomes almost necessary to the support of life and a sudden discontinuance of it without substituting an article equally stimulating might prove injurious. Hence the difficulty of producing a cure. "From Habit," says Dr. Nash "the use of strong drink takes place from necessity." He gives an instance of the insensibility to all the enticements of Love, friendships, and reputation, in a gentleman of this City; when strongly urged to leave off drinking, he said, were a keg of Rum in one corner of the room and a cannon constantly



discharging balls between me and it. I could not  
 refrain from Tapping before that Cannon in  
 order to get at the Ram. In the treatment of  
 this disease of the will the Dr. recommends  
 stimulating and tonic Remedies Preceded by  
 depletion and a situation where they will be  
 compelled to use their wills in order to escape  
 some great and pressing evils.

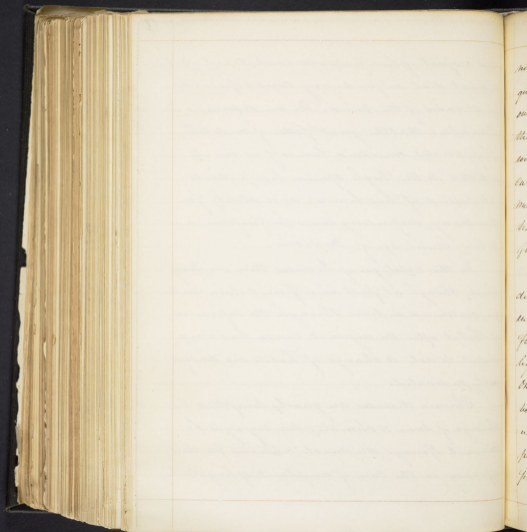
Nauseating medicines commingled with the  
 accustomed Potion, may have a good effect  
 in creating a disgust for the liquor and  
 consequently a disease. Habits of aversion are  
 produced by any slight degree of disgust  
 frequently reiterated and will often continue  
 with life. Religious impressions have some-  
 times power of use. In the treatment of this  
 as well as all other diseases a great deal may  
 be done by the Physician by obtaining by  
 his conduct the good opinion, Confidence



and respect of his Patients, as that will effect a great deal in producing cures especially in diseases of the mind. We are informed by Boracibus, that the great Father of medicine Hippocrates, considered himself as much indebted to the high opinion his Patients entertained of his honour and ability for the many surprising cures he performed as to his knowledge of Medicine.

In the catalogue of Diseases there are many which, though at first arise from certain causes are continued in time through the influence of Habit after the original cause has long ceased to act. A change of Habits are consequently indicated.

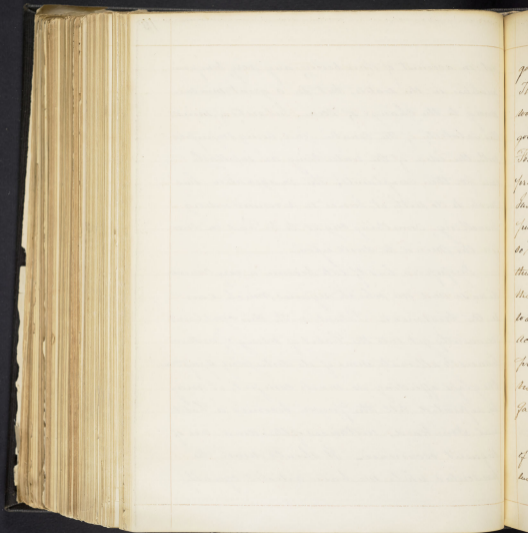
Chronic diseases are greatly benefited by change of scene & climate, sea voyages &c. Mineral Springs are much celebrated for their efficacy in the cure of complaints of long standing.



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not on account of their being any very beneficial qualities in the waters, but in a great measure owing to the change of scene, hilarity of mind, the salubrity of the Country and being impressed with the idea of the water being an infallible cure for their complaints; The imagination has much to do with it; hence in recommending travelling, something ought to be said in view for the mind to dwell upon.

Dyspepsia has of late become a very common disease and one which requires much care in the treatment. Patients with this complaint frequently get into the habit of using spirituous liquors to alleviate some of its distressing symptoms. The glass affording so much comfort, it may be repeated till the Quiver becomes a habitual drunkard; instances of this kind are of frequent occurrence. It should never be prescribed while we have articles equally



good without jeopardizing the soils of the Governor.  
 The Physician that would recommend it  
 would be highly culpable. Dr Parke on his first  
 going to London to study in consultation with Dr  
 Fothergill heard the Dr. strongly recommend the  
 practice of giving Brandy and water in Dyspepsia.  
 Just before he left England the Dr. waited on him  
 purposely to undo his former advice, having seen  
 so many of his Patients die from brands who had  
 thus recovered. As a substitute you may use  
 the Aromatic Spirits of Ammonia in Cinnamon  
 water, or other articles of this Nature; they cannot  
 acidify & are slightly stimulating. A good  
 Practice in this Complaint is regularly to  
 visit the privy every day, it will greatly  
 facilitate the cure.

A suspension of the accustomed Habits  
 of the body is an indication of disease and  
 we hail the return of these habits as the

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most favorable omen and on which the greatest reliance can be placed.

In Convalescence it is generally recommended to remove all spell boxes, talismans, &c. out of the sight of the Patient.

In conclusion, I must ~~say~~<sup>admit</sup> the kind indulgence of those who may choose to pursue these superstitious pages for the very many inaccuracies which a Tyro, in Medicine must necessarily commit in so arduous an undertaking, without having the advantage of those best of teachers, Practice and Experience to direct his steps.

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